

## Who pays for County Roads?

The simple answer is “The User Does.” Let’s look at county road fund sources. From 1996 thru 2001, County Road Departments received about 11% from the federal government. 28% came from the state. Federal and state dollars are mostly fuel taxes. 61% came from county taxes.

Most federal funds, 70%, come from the federal fuel tax. These dollars are for specific projects. The other 30% comes from the federal forest tax, and other miscellaneous grants. Federal funds can vary a lot from year to year.

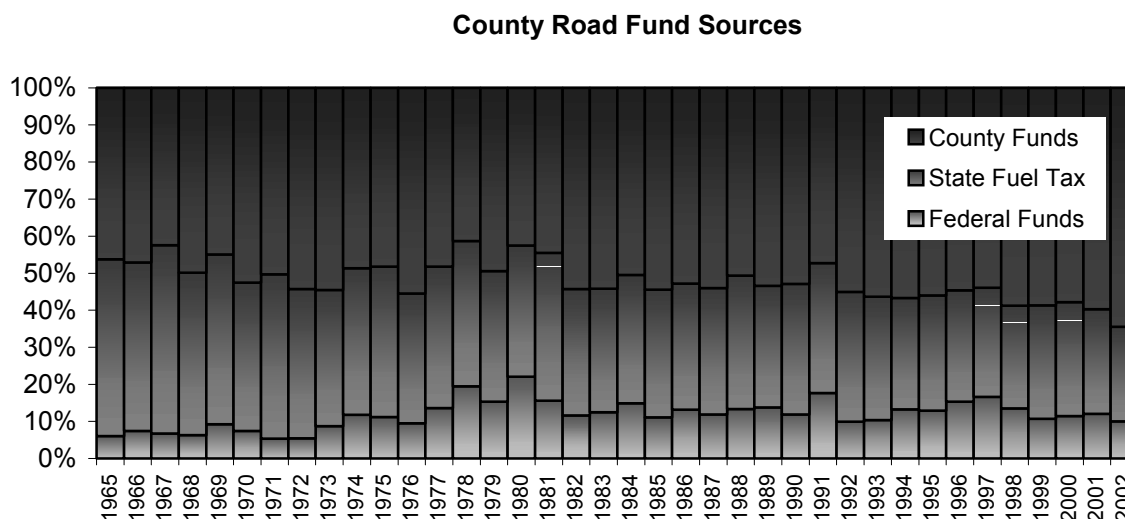
Nearly all state funds come from the state motor vehicle fuel tax. 63% is sent directly to each county. Additional state fuel tax funds are distributed for specific projects. They come through the County Road Administration Board at 17% and Transportation Improvement Board at 11%. The remaining 9% is from other state grants.

More than half of local funding is from the County Road property tax. The other local funding is highly variable. It includes impact fees, real estate excise tax, ferry tolls, permit fees, interest, reimbursable work, and other miscellaneous fees.

These numbers show funding for all 39 counties. The splits vary greatly between the counties.

For example, Whitman County is an average sized rural county. Whitman has 1,914 miles of county roads. Almost 70% of their funding came from state dollars in 2001. King County is an urban county with 1,832 miles of county roads. Local dollars made up more than 80% of their funds.

There are a few trends that are apparent where you look at the chart below. This chart shows actual Federal, State, and Local fund splits back to 1965.



As can be seen, state funding has gradually gone from almost  $\frac{1}{2}$  in 1965 to just over  $\frac{1}{4}$  in 2002.

Federal funds were at an all time high of 23% in 1980, thanks mostly to timber harvests. Another spike back to 18% in 1991 came from a federal fuel tax increase. In 2002 however, federal funds were only 10% of total County road revenue.

The local share for County Roads has continually gone up since 1965. It has gone from a low of 42% in 1978 to a high of 65% in 2002. County Roads have been required to fund more and more of their operations locally. Those dollars come mostly from the County Road Property Tax Levy. With the recent passage of property tax initiative growth limits, counties will be unlikely to keep up that level.

Only time will tell “Who Pays” for County Roads in the future. However, it is apparent that the trend for local citizens to pay more is here. This raises a number of policy questions about the value of county roads to citizens beyond those who live on them.

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Tim Fife, P.E., Public Works Director/County Engineer  
Franklin County

Questions about this article, or any of the series, or on other topics related to County Roads, may be directed either to your County Engineer, or to Al King, P.E., County Road Administration Board, Olympia, at [Al@CRAB.Wa.Gov](mailto:Al@CRAB.Wa.Gov).